

THE STATE OF THE BAR ASSOCIATION  
JUNE 20, 2009  
Charles L. Becton

INTRODUCTION

They say that an apple a day will keep the doctor away,  
That Friday the 13th is an unlucky day.  
They say it's good luck to find a four-leaf clover  
And, to avoid bad luck? Cross your fingers over.

THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY!

They say that persuasive eloquence comes from kissing the Blarney Stone,  
That one who refuses a kiss under the mistletoe will be alone.  
They say if you throw a coin in a fountain, your wish will come true.  
That the one with the long end of a wishbone gets a true wish too.

THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY!

So too, if you wish upon a shooting star  
Or blow out all birthday candles near and far.  
They say that walking under a ladder will surely bring you bad luck.  
That breaking a mirror causes your life, seven years, to be horror-struck.

THAT'S WHAT THEY SAY!

But then, they say **YOU CAN'T REALLY BELIEVE ALL** "THEY" SAY!

THEY THOUGHT IT COULDN'T BE DONE

Last June, when I announced the Bar Association's "Injustice Initiatives", scores of well-wishers smiled and complimented me on a wonderful inspirational and aspirational speech, emphasizing, of course, "aspirational". They thought "[I]t couldn't be done." But You must have read and found support and encouragement from Edgar Guest's poem, "It Couldn't Be Done." Listen to the last stanza:

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,  
There are thousands to prophesy failure,  
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,  
The dangers that await to assail you.  
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,  
Just take off your coat and go to it;  
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing  
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

Because of your hard work, we are able, resoundingly, to say to the skeptical well-wishers, "Yes, we did!" We "vigilantized" and mobilized a posse of lawyers to make sacrifice for, and to volunteer their time to help, the less fortunate. And we did it during one of the toughest years, economically, for lawyers – at a time when self-interest knew few bounds.

The Bar Association thanks you for transforming our hopes and fantasies into tangible realities.

We thank you for your commitment. We thank you for your efforts to ensure that we do not take (and I am quoting Martin Luther King, Jr. now) "necessities from the many to give luxuries to the few." We know that you have been fulfilled by giving. As Cesar Chavez said: "The truest act of courage, the strongest act of humanness is to sacrifice ourselves for others in a totally nonviolent struggle for justice."

Thanks to you, this has been a glorious year. You ought to be proud of Janet Ward Black's 4-All initiative that set the stage for our Equal Access to Courts and Injustice Initiatives. You ought to be proud of Allan Head's leadership and the efforts of the Chair of every Section, Division, Committee, and Taskforce. You ought to be proud of the work of the staff here at the Bar Center, and especially the staff whose responsibilities and duties placed them at the center of our Injustice Initiatives. I now refer to people like Michelle Cofield, Director of Public Service and Pro Bono Activity, and Diane Wright, Director of Law Related Education, whose efforts were extraordinary. So too were the efforts of two young, bright energetic staff people in their first year on the job—David Bohm, our Assistant Executive Director, and Kim Crouch, our Director of Governmental Affairs.

And to the man who always had my back with constant supportive e-mails and telephone calls, with weekly tirades against injustice, and who was the Bar Association's one-person committee on judicial salaries increases and adequate court funding, we owe a special thanks. I refer to the man who calls himself Lieutenant, even though tonight he becomes our General – Buddy Wester.

## THE YEAR IN REVIEW

And why are we so proud? Well, here are 10 of the many reasons:

1. Our February 15<sup>th</sup> \$100,000 unrestricted gift to LANC.
2. The two national awards NCBA received this year for its 4-All program – (1) the Harrison Tweed Award, presented by ABA's Standing Committee on Legal Aid and Indigent Defendants and the National Legal Aid and Defenders Association,

and (2) the National Conference of Bar Foundation's Award for Excellence in Public Service Programming.

3. The national recognition NCBA received this year for its Law Related Education program when the US Department of Education designated NCABA as home base for "We The People: Project Citizen" initiative.
4. The 400+ lawyers fielding nearly 6,500 calls on March 6<sup>th</sup> at our 4-All State-wide Service Day.
5. Our Bankruptcy Section providing 33 volunteer lawyers who fielded 623 calls on WRAL television station's "Attorneys On-Call" program on March 19<sup>th</sup>.
6. Our Young Lawyers Division's Wills For Heroes program, which provided over 1500 free Wills and Powers of Attorney for police officers, firefighters, and EMS personnel.
7. Our fully operational Legal Feeding Frenzy program that will collect 250,000 pounds of food for North Carolina's six major Food Banks.
8. The 75 attorneys who have volunteered to provide free mediation services to people who are unable to pay for those services.
9. Our Real Property Sections Home Foreclosure Prevention Project which has helped more than 1000 North Carolina homeowners avoid foreclosure, resulting in the lowest foreclosure rate in the South Atlantic region.
10. Our Tax Law Section's Commitment to assist Legal Aid of North Carolina in at least 10 pro bono tax cases.

We invented our future. We have created a lasting culture of pro bono participation.

## POETIC REFLECTIONS

### A NEW DAY

Harsh images of our profession with ridicule beset  
Impelled a new focus, a changed mindset  
To ferret and eradicate injustice at the outset  
And to ensure that legal needs of the poor were well-met.  
We railed against the sins of indifference and apathy  
While extolling the virtues of empathy.  
We thunder'd and roar'd for inclusiveness with earnest prithe  
For true tolerance not empty sympathy.

### FIGHTING THE WOLVES OF INJUSTICE

Shepherd of justice  
Powerless we are to stray  
Far from your sweet field.

We dare not forget  
The weak in our flock. We must  
Keep the wolves at bay.

#### IT'S RAINING

Our excess income is not  
    a treasure to be admired  
Nor a stock-piled surplus  
    for others to envy  
It is a Horn of Plenty required  
to feed the many.  
It's our umbrella.

#### NO PAIN, NO GAIN

Without equal court access  
Ensured by volunteers' largess  
We can't profess success

#### THE HUE AND CRY RESPONSE

When HOPE needs repair  
DARE! DARE! DARE!  
    To be aware  
        To play fair  
            To care

#### DRINK DEEPLY

Informed choices and horizons expanding  
Disbanding superficiality  
For a sober understanding  
The skeptics and naysayers, notwithstanding

#### 4 ETERNITY

4-All, 4-Ever  
4-Ever, 4-All

This noble call  
We do install  
This noble call  
Will forever enthrall

#### MINGLE, DON'T JUST TOLERATE

zestful inclusiveness, not zealless tolerance  
the prescription for social progress is diversity,  
the protecting shield against inhumanity

#### MOST TREASURED GIFT

our service to the poor  
is not solely a benefit to them,  
it is also a fulfilling gift to us.  
the gift of our gift is our reason for living.

#### A FULL HEART WITH SPACE FOR GIVING

this luxury is free, yet priceless  
it doubles when it expands.  
this haven is snug, yet open  
it surrounds when it extends.  
this treasure is full, yet unwhelmed  
it stows up when it befriends.

#### ECSTASY

Charitable giving restores hope, dignity  
And in return for our welcomed volunteerism  
Is the pleased joy of altruism.

#### CONCLUSION

It's great when we can reflect on the "Good" we have done. Reflections are uplifting. They inspire us to do more good in the future. When we reflect, we realize that the Good Life is not "measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath [away]."